The British Cardiovascular Society Annual Conference, 7–10 June 2021: the Vice President’s message

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On behalf of the President, Board, Executive and Programme Committee at the British Cardiovascular Society (BCS), we look forward to welcoming you in June for the BCS 2021 Annual Conference. It is the first time we are holding this as a virtual Conference and our theme this year is ‘Cardiology and the Environment’. The past year or so has been challenging, going through the COVID-19 pandemic with most unprecedented circumstances, which makes the theme of the conference even more relevant.

The conference will be opened by the BCS President, Professor Simon Ray, followed by the keynote opening lecture entitled ‘Cardiovascular disease on a changing planet’ delivered by Professor Sir Andrew Haines. This is a named BCS Desmond Julian lecture in honour of the late Professor Desmond Julian, ex-president of the BCS (1985–87), who passed away in 2019. Professor Haines, who had collaborated with Professor Julian in the past, is Professor of Environmental Change and Public Health and was the Director of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (2001–10) and co-chair of the Rockefeller Foundation / Lancet Commission on Planetary Health (2014/15). His research focus has been on the effects of environmental change on health and the impact of polices to adapt to or mitigate these changes and currently co-chairs the InterAcademy Partnership working group on climate change and health and participates in the Lancet Commission on Pollution and the Lancet Commission on the COVID-19 response.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the British Heart Foundation (BHF). To mark this important milestone, there is a BHF Lecture to be given by Professor Salim Yusuf, Distinguished University Professor of Medicine at McMaster University, Canada. Professor Yusuf has close links with the BHF and the UK, having obtained his DPhil at Oxford supported by a BHF Junior Research Fellowship and as a Rhodes scholar. He is Heart and Stroke Foundation/Marion W. Burke Chair in Cardiovascular Disease and Executive Director of the Population Health Research Institute at McMaster and Past President of the World Heart Foundation. Professor Yusuf’s pioneering studies over an extended research career have established the value of several treatments for heart diseases and strokes, changing the way that patients are treated worldwide. His lecture is entitled ‘Environment, risk factors and health systems – relative impact on CVD and mortality’.

WHAT’S NEW FOR 2021?

In view of the ongoing restrictions related to the pandemic, the BCS Board has decided to host our 2021 Annual Conference on the digital platform for the first time. We aim to retain as much of the content and flavour of the rich programme of our usual conference as possible. The conference is being held over 4 half-days with 5 parallel tracks each day including all the major subspecialty sessions. We have particularly adjusted the didactic content to maximise interactive discussions – so we can expect some lively interchange and debates on hot scientific areas and up-to-date clinical practice! We also have ‘Live at the Auditorium’ sessions which, as the name suggests, will be streamed live from the auditorium at Manchester Central where studio-style panel sessions will be held to further enhance dynamic discussions. This will not only give us a flavour of what we are used to in the usual face-to-face conference but also develop the blended approach in digital transformation of the conference moving forward.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The BCS Programme Committee has worked hard to pack as much of the diverse content we normally host at the Annual Conference as possible on the virtual platform with contributions from a superb faculty:-

International Track

By popular demand, this track represents focussed sessions with key opinion leaders from the American College of Cardiology and European Society of Cardiology who will present and discuss updates on new guidelines on the important topics of “athletes with cardiovascular disease” and “new look in the approach to AF assessment and treatment”, providing perspectives from both sides of the Atlantic and implications for clinical practice. The session on “clinician burn-out” is especially relevant to what the medical community has gone through over the pandemic, where its impact and more importantly, ways to tackle burn-out will be discussed.

Named lectures

The BCS ‘Named Lectures’ are a major feature of the conference, presented by distinguished clinicians and academics, on key clinical and research areas at the scientific cutting edge. This year, the BCS Paul Wood lecture will be given by Professor David Newby, entitled ‘Car sick: the cardiovascular effects of air pollution’. Professor Newby is BHF Duke of Edinburgh Chair of Cardiology, Director of the Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility and consultant interventional cardiologist at the University of Edinburgh. His research focusses on advanced imaging and clinical trials of cardiovascular disease, with a major interest in the atherothrombotic effects of air pollution and the interaction between cardiac and respiratory diseases.

The John French lecture, organised by the British Society of Cardiovascular Research (BSCR) and the British Atherosclerosis Society (BAS), will be delivered by Dr Nicola Smart, entitled ‘Mechanisms of vessel growth and repair: insights from the developing embryo’. Dr Smart is BHF Ian Fleming Fellow and Associate Professor of Cardiovascular Development and Regeneration at the University of Oxford. Her major research interests are in myocardial and coronary vessel development with studies of the embryonic heart revealing key mechanisms on the maintenance of vessel stability throughout adult life.
**BHF sessions**

There is ongoing strong collaboration with the BHF at the BCS Annual Conference, especially with this being the BHF’s 60th anniversary. Professor Sir Nilesh Samani, BHF Medical Director, who has initiated the NIHR-BHF Cardiovascular Partnership, will co-chair the session highlighting the COVID-19 Flagship Projects originated in response to the pandemic. The Spotlight on BHF Fellows session will feature some of the UK’s leading cardiovascular research scientists. The BHF Clinical Research Collaborative (CRC) session will highlight activities of the new BHF-BCS initiative, established pre-pandemic, with updates on exciting clinical collaborative research areas.

**Collaboration with the BSCR and BAS**

The importance of fundamental science in the advancement of knowledge and novel insight towards translational developments into clinical innovation and patient benefit cannot be understated. The BCS Annual Conference has been an excellent forum for the ‘meeting of the minds’ between basic science and clinical communities with exciting scientific interchange. The ‘basic science’ track continues to be provided by the BSCR/BAS Spring meeting programme in the conference with sessions on: 1) Novel insights into cardiovascular comorbidities, 2) Neuro-immune modulation of cardiovascular function and 3) A decade of genome-wide association studies. Other basic science sessions include the Best of the Best Oral Abstracts and Rapid fire poster presentations as well as the John French lecture.

**BCS sessions**

There are 2 Cardiac, Renal and Metabolic (CaReMe) UK sessions at the conference on ‘Heart Failure’ and ‘Coronary Artery Disease’ highlighting the important crossroads in the multidisciplinary care of cardiac patients. There is a Women in Cardiology session on ‘Building a healthy culture’, a ‘Digital innovation in Cardiology: What’s new?’ session and MDT Live session on ‘Inherited Cardiac Conditions’. The Emerging Leaders Programme (ELP) has been running for 2 successful years where delegates are trained with skills required to lead service change and provide professional leadership. The top-scoring quality improvement projects from the 2 cohorts will be presented at the ELP session.

**Clinical science and translational research**

The Young Investigator Award competition continues to be a main feature showcasing top quality research work where the 5 shortlisted candidates will present their work to an esteemed judges panel. There will be a research presentation by the Michael Davies Early Career Award recipient at the conference.

We have also received a record number of abstracts this year and the accepted abstracts will be posted on the conference website as oral presentations on demand. The top three scoring abstracts of each of the 7 clinical categories are included as Best of the Best clinical abstracts which will be judged by an expert panel and a winner decided for each of the categories.

**Education and Revalidation sessions**

Our popular Education for Revalidation (E4R) sessions continue to run this year with sessions on ‘ECG interpretation’, ‘Contemporary device therapy for heart failure’, ‘Pulmonary hypertension’, ‘AF made interesting’, ‘ACHD’ and ‘MI and ACS in 2021’. Lifelong learning sessions will provide interactive teaching on up-to-date cardiological practice on a broad spectrum of key clinical areas. ‘Top ten trials’ will provide an update on important clinical trials and discussion on their implications for application to clinical practice. The popular ‘Hot Topics’ presentations are also featured both on demand and live-streamed. We also have a ‘Best of Heart’ session highlighting key papers published recently in Heart as well as a first joint BCS session with European Heart Journal on ‘The Year in Cardiovascular Medicine’.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Finally, I am deeply grateful to clinical and scientific colleagues, both national and overseas, for their important contribution to this year’s BCS Annual Conference Programme, especially considering the immense workload and added pressures this past year of the epidemic had thrown at us. I would like to thank the BHF for their help and support for the conference and the staff, officers and Programme Committee of the BCS who have worked tirelessly adapting to the changes needed to plan and deliver the virtual conference. Details of the conference can be found at [www.britishcardiovascularsociety.org/conference/home](http://www.britishcardiovascularsociety.org/conference/home). Looking ahead, 2022 is an important year as it is the Centenary of the BCS. Celebrating 100 years and being the longest established professional cardiac society in the world, we are planning to get back to a face-to-face conference at Manchester Central in June 2022. Details of the full celebration programme and Centenary annual conference will follow. Until then, we look forward to welcoming you to the 2021 BCS virtual conference first!

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